

THE WHITE-WINGED DOVE *STREPTOPELIA REICHENOWI* IN SE ETHIOPIA,
COMPARISONS WITH OTHER SPECIES, AND
A FIELD KEY FOR IDENTIFICATION

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The White-winged Dove is the least known of several similarly sized species of *Streptopelia* inhabiting East and North East Africa. The range is given by Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1957) as southern Abyssinia and the Juba River Valley in Italian Somaliland. However, it was not included in the checklist of Ethiopian birds (Urban & Brown 1971) because of uncertainties about its occurrence in Ethiopia. It has since been found by Ash *et al.* (1974) to be common in S. Harrar, Bale and Sidamo provinces close to rivers and associating with *S. capicola* and *S. decipiens*. They found evidence of breeding but have not yet described the nest and eggs. According to Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1957) its nest is undescribed.

At Gode, in the lower valley of the Webi Shebeli river in SE Ethiopia this species was found to be the commonest of small *Streptopelia* doves between 1-4 February 1977. It appeared to replace the Mourning Dove *S. decipiens* in its general habits, being found in patches of vegetation and small irrigated areas near the river. The area, originally acacia woodland, has been much degraded by overgrazing, but the establishment of small irrigation schemes with planted windbreaks has provided new habitat in which the White-winged Dove was abundant. Probably it has always been present in the Webi Shebeli valley, but has passed unnoticed due to a lack of observers.

A nest was found about 2.5 m above ground in a Jerusalem Thorn *Parkinsonia aculeata* near the guest-house of the Institute of Agricultural Research. It was the usual flimsy semi-transparent platform of loosely interlaced twigs and leaf-petioles, and contained two regular oval white eggs, similar to those of other small doves. The eggs were not taken as I had no means of preserving them, so I observed the habits of the bird for varying periods each day. As a result, I can add a little to what is known of this species.

The nest was about 15 cm across, too small to accommodate the sitting bird, whose tail projected. Both sexes incubated, and both sat very tight, allowing human approach to within 1 m without leaving, no doubt because they were well accustomed to human beings. On the occasions when they did leave, sitting birds were back on the eggs within 10 min. One bird, perhaps the female, sat more than the other, incubating all one night and up to 08.40 hrs the following morning. However, the sexes could not be distinguished on short acquaintance.

At nest reliefs the arriving bird alighted some 20 m from the nest and then approached the nest by short flights from perch to perch. It uttered the characteristic call, unlike that of any other *Streptopelia* species, and was answered by the sitting bird. The call is described by Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1957) as a deep guttural 'coo-coo-coo' but this is misleading. It is actually a deep-toned 'kok-kooorrrr-kok-kooorrrr' repeated rapidly about fifteen times. A low, crooning 'crooo-crooo-crooo-crooo' similar in tone is also uttered. The sitting bird called more often at nest relief than the relieving bird, which, as it moved nearer the nest, raised and lowered the tail exposing the pale-coloured

outer tail feathers. When the relief bird was within a few metres of the nest the sitting bird flew away directly and, in the cases observed, out of sight, then the relief bird flew into the nest tree and moved to the nest quietly. On 3 February nest reliefs occurred at 16.10 and 17.50 hrs and the bird remained sitting until 08.40 hrs the following morning.

Many observers find small *Streptopelia* species resident in East and north-eastern Africa hard to distinguish, and standard works are not very helpful on the subject. In practice, a combination of calls and plumage characters, and notably eye-colour, makes field identification easy. I give below field distinctions applicable to all species set out as an extended field key, including salient features of habitat, plumage, voice and eye-colour. The European Turtle Dove *S. turtur* is omitted as it is not known to breed in East or north-eastern Africa, though recorded as a winter visitor commonly in Ethiopia, and occasionally as far south as Kenya (Horne & Short 1977).

Field key to Streptopelia species breeding in E and NE Africa

- 1 With a black collar on the hind-neck, sometimes edged white 3
Without a black collar on the hind-neck 2
- 2 With black patches on the sides of the neck, rufous edges to upper wing-coverts; larger, darker; habitat montane forests etc. Call a deep crooning 'co-coooooorrr-coooooorrr-cooorrr' *lugens*
Smaller, with blackish spots forming a collar on the breast, bluish wings; savannah and cultivation; call a chuckling 'co-coro-kuku' *senegalensis*
- 3 Larger, tips of outer tail feathers grey, eye dark red; call 'coo-coo-cu-roo-coo-coo' repeated; alighting call a buzzing 'tzzzz' *semitorquata*
Smaller, paler, white tips to outer tail feathers 4
- 4 Eye dark or black 5
Eye yellowish brown or yellow 6
- 5 Call a hurried 'cor-ca-du, cor-ca-du'; darker grey; savannas N and NW Africa to W Ethiopia and Uganda *vinacea*
Call a high-pitched 'kuk-krooor-kuk, kuk-krooor-kuk'; alighting, a high-pitched buzzing 'tzz-rrrr-rrr'; savannas, S and E Africa to NE Ethiopia. Paler grey *capicola*
Call a rather high-pitched 'kuk-kurrrwooo'; much paler, black collar narrow; semi-arid areas to deserts. NE Ethiopia and Somalia. *decacto*
- 6 Calls varied; 'kroook-currroooo' and 'kuk-krooo-ooo' repeated, deep-toned; alighting 'krraaaw'; paler, prefers riverine habitat. Eye yellow, surrounded by red ring *decipiens*
Eye surrounded by white ring of feathers resembling *Zosterops* spp.
Some white visible at bend of wing. Call, rapidly repeated 'kok-koorrr-kok-koorrr'; also crooning 'crooo-crooo' repeated. Darker, more uniform grey than *decipiens* *reichenowi*

In view of the fact that the eye of the White-winged Dove is surrounded by a white ring of tiny feathers (a very conspicuous and distinctive field mark), whereas the white edging at the bend of the wing is not conspicuous in the field, it might be more suitable to call this species the *White-ringed* rather than White-winged Dove. When taking flight the

white outer webs of the greater and median wing-coverts become more conspicuous but this is not a very easy field distinction. Knowledge of the calls will enable an observer to distinguish all species of *Streptopelia* without seeing any of them; and, combined with eye-colour and habitat preferences, no real difficulty in identification should be experienced.

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SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

AN APRIL FALL OF PALAEARCTIC MIGRANTS AT NGULIA

The phenomenal falls of southward-moving Palaearctic night migrants at Ngulia Safari Lodge in Tsavo National Park (West) each November-December are well documented (Pearson & Backhurst 1976b, Backhurst & Pearson 1977). Pearson & Backhurst (1976b) suggested that local topography probably accounts for the virtual absence of grounded migrants on return passage in April, when migrants which have cleared the ridge are presumably too high to be attracted to the game-viewing lights at Ngulia Lodge below. As is the case elsewhere in the Tsavo region, the November-December short rains are typically heavier and more reliable than the long rains of March-May, so that low cloud and prolonged rain at night are uncommon in April. In addition, winds in April are often strong, which tend to disperse any mist which may have formed.

Passerine migration at ground level often bears little relation to the situation overhead. This difference is striking at Ngulia in November-December, but even more so in April, when observations since 1971 have revealed very small numbers of migrants compared with routine April concentrations in central and western Kenya (Pearson & Backhurst 1976a, pers. obs.). Apart from a scattering of Red-backed Shrikes* and a few Lesser Grey Shrikes *Lanius minor*, passerine movement in April is typically evidenced by a few Willow Warblers and Whitethroats, occasional Sprossers and Garden Warblers, a few Sedge Warblers *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* and an occasional Marsh Warbler later in the month. Hitherto, only in 1973, late in April, has an appreciable density of warblers (Whitethroats, Sedge, Willow and Marsh Warblers) been encountered in the Ngulia hills in spring (D.J. Pearson *in litt.*).

A single Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* was the only Palaearctic migrant seen

*Scientific names of most species are given in Table 1.